



Meet The Team: Wayne Vander Tuin

Wayne Vander Tuin is the Regional Transportation Program Manager for the Midwest Region, and works out of Omaha, Nebraska. Wayne has been with the National Park Service for 36 years. And, you'd better read this quickly, because he's due to retire any minute now!.

Before coming to the Park Service, Wayne was with the Army Corps of Engineers for approximately three years, based in Omaha. He started there right out of college.

“Corps representatives came up to South Dakota State, interviewed a number of students, and hired seven or eight of us who were graduating in the class of '74,” said Wayne. “I had thought I'd be working for a small engineering firm when I graduated, but there was a recession at the time, and jobs in the private sector weren't that plentiful.”

Wayne said that after a couple of years with the Corps, he started getting restless. “I was looking at what at the time were called ‘the pink sheets,’ which listed federal jobs, and

Wayne Vander Tuin is the Regional Transportation Program Manager for the Midwest Region of the NPS.



I saw a listing for a GS 11-12 civil engineer for the National Park Service in Omaha. I applied and got the job.”

He described the transition from the Corps of Engineers to the National Park Service as “a huge culture shock.” “The last project I worked on with the Corp was a \$30 million aircraft hangar at Offutt Air Base (near Omaha). One of my first jobs with the NPS was a parking lot that cost like \$8,000! And I quickly learned that there weren’t a lot of design guidelines. I was used to working with the Corp, which had design guidelines for everything...when you had questions, you looked in the book. As an example: ‘The minimum sewer pipe size is six inches. Period. It didn’t matter if you had only one toilet hooked up to it...it was six inches. With the Park Service, there was a lot of waving of the arms and pointing. That took some getting used to, but it’s a good system after you get used to it.”

In 1984, Wayne became the facility manager at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore...

Before Wayne got involved in transportation programs, he served as a design engineer on a variety of projects. “I did everything from parking lots and roads to water and sewer systems,” he said. “Then, in the early 80s, there was a big reorganization proposed, with rumors that the Omaha NPS office would be closed, and the work divvied up between Philadelphia and Denver. I decided it was time to get out into a Park.”

Even though the reorganization did not occur, in 1984 Wayne became the facility manager at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. “I’d done a lot of work at that park while I was based in Omaha, because it was a relatively new park, and had lots of development going on,” said Wayne. “Sleeping Bear Dunes is located on the shore of Lake Michigan, where there’s a mainland unit, plus two good-sized island units as well: North and South Manitou Islands.”

After four years in that position, Wayne moved to Yellowstone National Park, where he served as the assistant chief of maintenance for four years. Then it was on to the Denver Service Center and the eastern design team. “Probably half my time at the DSC was spent at Gateway National Recreation Area...there was no shortage of work at Gateway,”

Wayne said. “Then in 1996, I came back to Omaha. For three years I was back in design and project management, and then in October of 1999 I moved into the Federal Lands Highway position.” (This job is now called the Regional Transportation Program Manager.)

Wayne says that, when he was growing up in Platte, South Dakota, he always thought he would like to be an engineer. “Even when I was in grade school and junior high school, I thought I’d be an engineer,” he said. “The scary part was, I didn’t really know what engineers did. I thought of it as applied math and science, and solving problems, which I liked. I struggled with pure math in college, but I always enjoyed the process of engineering and design, and solving problems.”



Yellowstone Public Automobile Camp

National Parks were part of Wayne’s early years. “Where I grew up, in south central South Dakota, a trip to The Black Hills was your standard vacation,” he said. “If you didn’t go anywhere else, you went to the Black Hills.”

And on the way to the Black Hills were The Badlands. “I remember it being the most hot and miserable place on earth, Wayne said. “Cars without air conditioning, buildings with no air conditioning. We’d usually go in August, and it was probably 100 degrees, with a hot wind, and it was just miserable. So that was my view of Badlands. Now I go up to Badlands in May, and it’s green, and it’s beautiful, and now it’s one of my favorite Parks. I suppose part of it is the adult perspective compared to a 6- to 12-year-old.”

Badlands, Mount Rushmore, Jewel Cave: these were

Wayne's first introduction to National Parks. "I didn't know they were national parks," Wayne said. "They were just part of the Black Hills. Then we did a couple of vacations to Yellowstone and Grand Tetons. Man, when I was a kid, that



Wayne and his sister in The Badlands

I remember the Badlands being the most hot and miserable place on earth...

first vacation to Yellowstone...I just thought that was the most amazing place!"

When Wayne was asked about mentors in his career, he was ready with answers. "The first person that comes to mind is John Kawamoto; he was my second level supervisor at the NPS regional office in Omaha, and was the associate regional director. He had a sign on his desk: Rule #1, The Boss Is Always Right. On the other side, it said, Rule #2: See Rule #1. John believed that. He drilled three things into his employees: 'Keep management informed, keep the superintendents happy, and always look out for the smaller parks.' Those have been rules to live by. As soon as you ignore them, you find yourself in trouble."

"John ruled with a strong hand, but you always knew where he stood, and where you stood, and after he left, we missed him," Wayne said. "There were few managers with that strong of a personality. He's probably the strongest manager I've ever worked with, and people didn't appreciate him until he wasn't around."

Wayne also mentioned his first supervisor at the Corp of Engineers, Ray Reerink, as an important influence. “Ray was a great writer,” Wayne said. “At that time, there were no computers, so you wrote everything—memos, letters, reports—out in longhand. He would just bleed red ink all over your drafts. He taught me a lot about good writing skills. When I talk to high school and college students, I tell them that they need to be able to talk to people, and to write clearly.”

There have been a lot of NPS projects Wayne has been involved with, but the one he’s proudest of is the Pierce Stocking Scenic Drive at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. “There was a pre-existing scenic drive, but it was a 4R project to the max,” Wayne said. “We re-routed all over the place, added parking, and more. I helped plan it, and served as the regional representative for the DSC team. There were a lot of field trips, walking through the landscape, flagging routes. By coincidence it happened that when I was the chief of maintenance at Sleeping Bear Dunes, they started construction on the road.”

Wayne’s involvement with that scenic drive didn’t end when he moved on to other parks. “Now that I’m in the Transportation Program, I’ve done work on the Pierce Stocking road as a pavement preservation project,” Wayne added. “Not ‘cradle to grave,’ but ‘cradle to operations and preventative maintenance.’ That’s very satisfying. And as old as that road is, built in about 1985, it’s still in immaculate shape. It says a lot for a good base, and good drainage.”



8801 PARK STAGE AT MAMMOTH HOT SPRING, YELLOWSTONE PARK.

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Yellowstone Stage Coach at Mammoth Hot Springs

Now that he's nearing retirement, Wayne has plenty to keep him busy in the way of hobbies. He's an avid bicyclist, and enjoys kayaking and photography. And one of his favorite pastimes is collecting antique postcards of National Parks.

"That started out on a Park Service trip," Wayne said. "I was stationed in Yellowstone, and I was going to the St. Louis Arch for a meeting, and I was prowling around a St. Louis antiques store, and they had some old postcards of Yellowstone. I thought, well these are neat, so I bought some. I came home with a dozen of them. And that's how I got started. And now I've got thousands of pictures and inventories, and checklists and everything." (Some of Wayne's cards illustrate this article.)

"I've got some really neat cards," Wayne said. "It's amazing...a card can be over 100 years old, and still be in mint condition. If a card has anything to do with transportation, I will usually get it, or if there's someone in uniform on it. Or people doing things, or buildings that I know are no longer there."

Reflecting on 36 years with the Park Service, Wayne says he's enjoyed a lot of friendships, and the challenge of design and solving problems.

"But the best moments are always in a Park," he says. "Sleeping Bear Dunes on a boat in July, and the water's smooth, and you're going in or out to the island. At Yellowstone there were just so many great moments out in the Park. Now it's driving out to the Badlands at sunrise, and the sun's coming up and the colors are just gorgeous. I have



Yellowstone Gardiner Railroad Station

to pinch myself and remind myself that I'm being paid to do this!"

"Some people think that wandering around in the parks is all we do, and we have to remind them that maybe 98 percent of the time is spent in an office. That's when you remind yourself of why you're doing this job."